



CHARLESTON COUNTY
GREENBELT PROGRAM

Celebrating 20 Years of Preserving Special Places



Charleston County
Greenbelt Program

2006-2026

Introduction

Dear Friends,

For more than twenty years, Charleston County’s Greenbelt Program has played a steady and important role in shaping the Lowcountry—protecting special natural areas, safeguarding water and wildlife, securing land for public parks and strengthening the region’s overall quality of life.

Charleston County’s Greenbelt Program has thrived because of the vision and support of its citizens. What began as a shared commitment to protect the places that make the Lowcountry special has grown into a lasting legacy of preserved landscapes, cleaner waterways, and stronger communities. This anniversary is not just a celebration of land protected—it’s a celebration of the people who made it possible. Thank you for believing in conservation and helping keep Charleston County green for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Beezer Molten
Greenbelt Advisory Board Chairman

On the cover: The Gathering Ground: A Conservancy of the Sea Islands Preserve on Johns Island. Future park managed by Conservancy of the Sea Islands.



Great Blue Herons chicks at future Ingelside Park



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Origin & Vision

In November 2004, Charleston County voters approved a ½-percent Sales and Use Tax to improve the overall quality of life in the community. This funding supports safer roads, better transportation options, and the protection of natural areas and greenspace through the Greenbelt Program. The County began collecting the tax in May 2005, with up to \$221.5 million over 25 years dedicated to greenbelt projects.

To make sure the money is used responsibly, Charleston County Council created a transparent public process that includes citizen advisory boards. Working with planning consultants, County staff, and the Greenbelt Advisory Board (GAB), the County developed the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan. This plan identified existing greenspaces, predicted future needs, reviewed potential funding sources, and set criteria for considering projects.

The GAB's role in initial plan development was to gather public input and provide recommendations to County Council. The Board considered feedback and data from community meetings, surveys, open houses, GIS mapping, site visits and reviews of past planning efforts.

The plan was developed through community meetings, open houses, online updates, GIS mapping, site visits, and reviews of past planning efforts.

Key components of the plan include an overview of goals, data on existing greenspace, a needs assessment, a long-term conservation framework, and implementation steps. After extensive public input and analysis, the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan was finalized in 2006 and adopted into the County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The plan is a living document that is updated periodically to reflect current priorities.

In 2016, Charleston County voters approved a sales tax referendum that provided a new revenue source for the Greenbelt Program and other transportation-related projects through an additional ½-percent sales and use tax. For Greenbelts specifically, this tax will generate \$210 million in new funding to be collected over 25 years.

2004

Citizens vote for a ½-percent sales tax.

2006

Greenbelt Plan finalized.

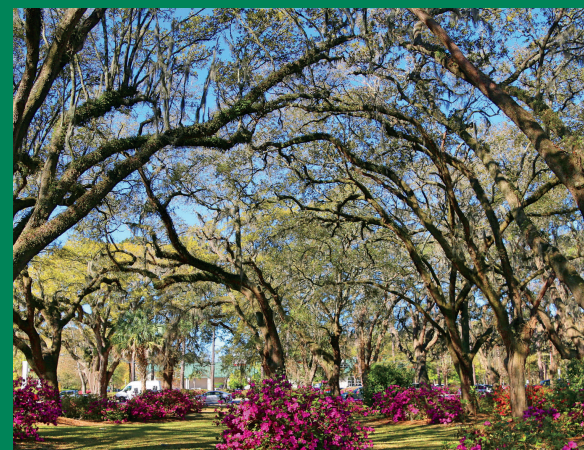
2007

Incorporated into County Land Use Plan.

2016

Citizens vote for another ½-percent sales tax.

Charleston County citizens boldly invested in their future—choosing conservation alongside progress.



Ellis Oaks Park - James Island, SC



The Murrell Tract - Francis Marion National Forest

WHAT WE DO

Charleston County Greenbelt conserves natural resources, preserves rural character, and helps to acquire outdoor spaces for public enjoyment.

WHY IT MATTERS

Charleston County's Greenbelt Program matters because it preserves the Lowcountry's natural beauty, strengthens water quality and flood resilience, and provides public access to nature and recreation. The program has helped shape the region's future by balancing growth with conservation, ensuring that the Lowcountry's natural beauty and ecological health are safeguarded into the future.



Center for the Birds of Prey Awendaw, SC



Dungannon Nature Preserve Hollywood, SC



Dupre Island McClellanville, SC

Greenbelt Landscapes

Charleston County's Greenbelt Program protects a variety of landscapes that together create a healthy, connected environment for both the community and the region's wildlife. These include passive greenspaces such as trails, greenways, interpretive parks, and water-access points for activities like fishing, boating, and crabbing, as well as active greenspaces like play fields and low-impact parks. The program safeguards the Lowcountry's natural resources, including upland forests, wetlands, Carolina bays, marsh islands, and other distinctive ecosystems, along with working lands used for agriculture, silviculture, and mariculture. It also prioritizes important cultural and historic sites, scenic corridors, and natural infrastructure such as floodplains, wildlife habitat, and riparian areas. Even previously abandoned or underused sites, including brownfields and infill areas, can be restored as reclaimed greenspace. Together, these diverse landscapes form an interconnected system that supports residents, businesses, visitors, and future generations by preserving what makes our region special and strengthening overall quality of life.



Passive greenspace: Trails, greenways, interpretive parks, and access points for water activities, such as fishing, crabbing, boating, etc.

Active greenspace: Play fields and parks with low environmental impact.



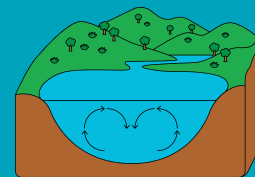
Lowcountry natural resources: Upland forests, swamps, bogs, brackish and freshwater wetlands, Carolina bays, marsh islands, and cypress, backwater, and saltwater marshes.

Productive landscapes: Lands used for agriculture, silviculture, and mariculture.



Heritage landscapes: Irreplaceable cultural and historical landscapes unique to the County.

Corridors: Scenic roadways, abandoned rail lines, utility corridors, and scenic waterways.



Natural Infrastructure: Floodplains, wildlife habitat, riparian zones, and lands critical to clean water.

Reclaimed greenspace: Brownfields, abandoned sites, and other green infill projects.



2 Paths to Protection



Fee Simple

A fee simple acquisition transfers full ownership and rights of land. Properties secured through this method are typically converted into public parks and greenspaces.



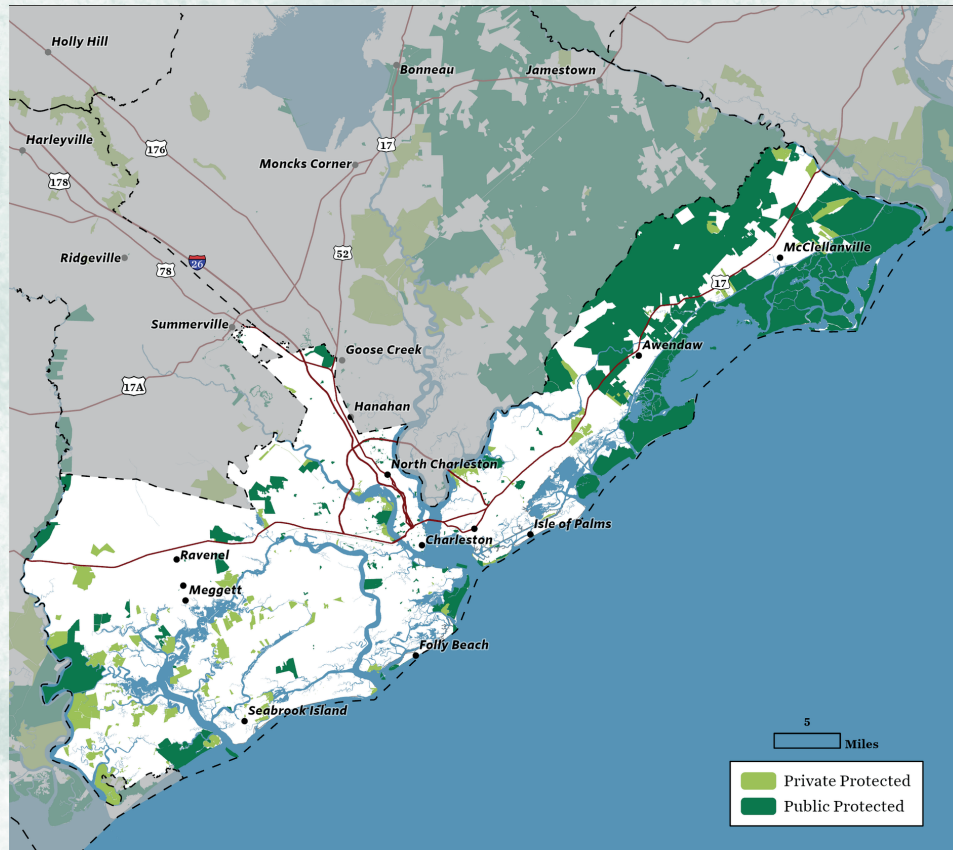
Conservation Easement

A conservation easement is a legal agreement where the owner keeps the land but restricts its future development.

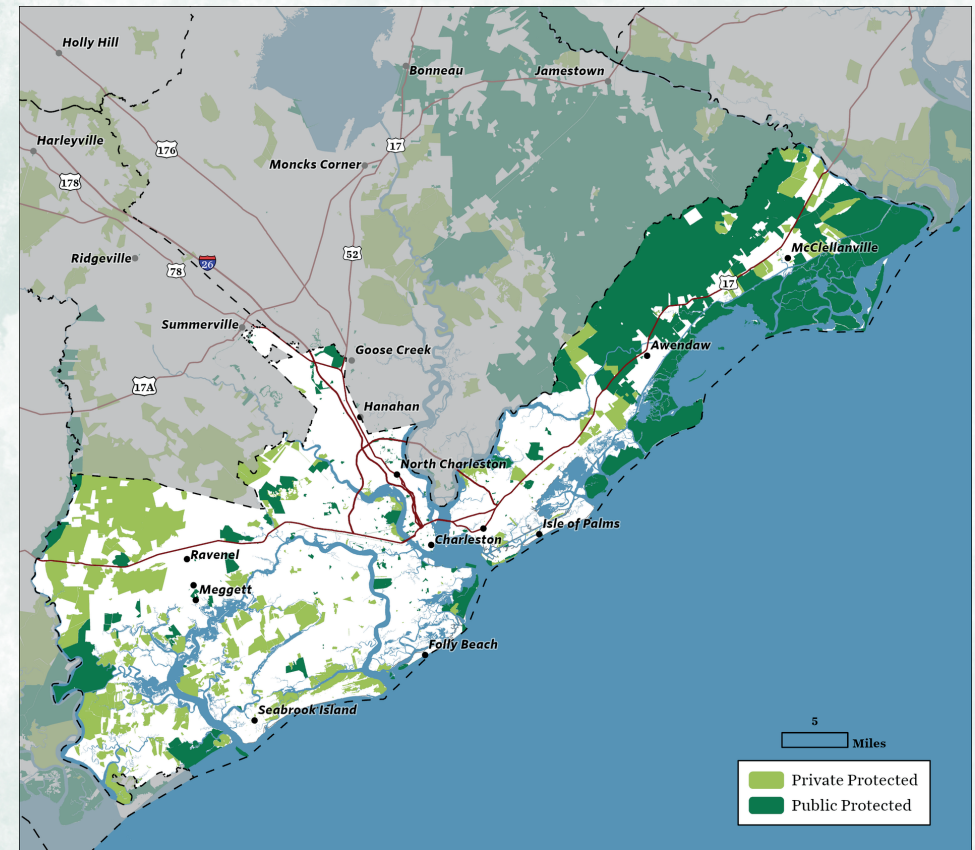
The Impact of the Charleston County Greenbelt Program

In the two decades since its establishment, the Charleston County Greenbelt Program has made a lasting and visible impact on both the environment and the quality of life for residents. The program has helped preserve thousands of acres of land, from oak-lined riverbanks to agricultural fields, historic sites, and wildlife-rich wetlands. These protected areas function not only as beautiful open spaces but also as natural infrastructure that supports resilience, ecology, and community well-being. The two maps below show the protected greenspace that existed before the program began in 2006 compared to what is protected today.

2006



2026



Maps and data courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

At the launch of the Greenbelt Plan, Charleston County had 160,000 acres of protected greenspace.
The Charleston County Greenbelt Program has protected 28,855 acres as of September 2026.

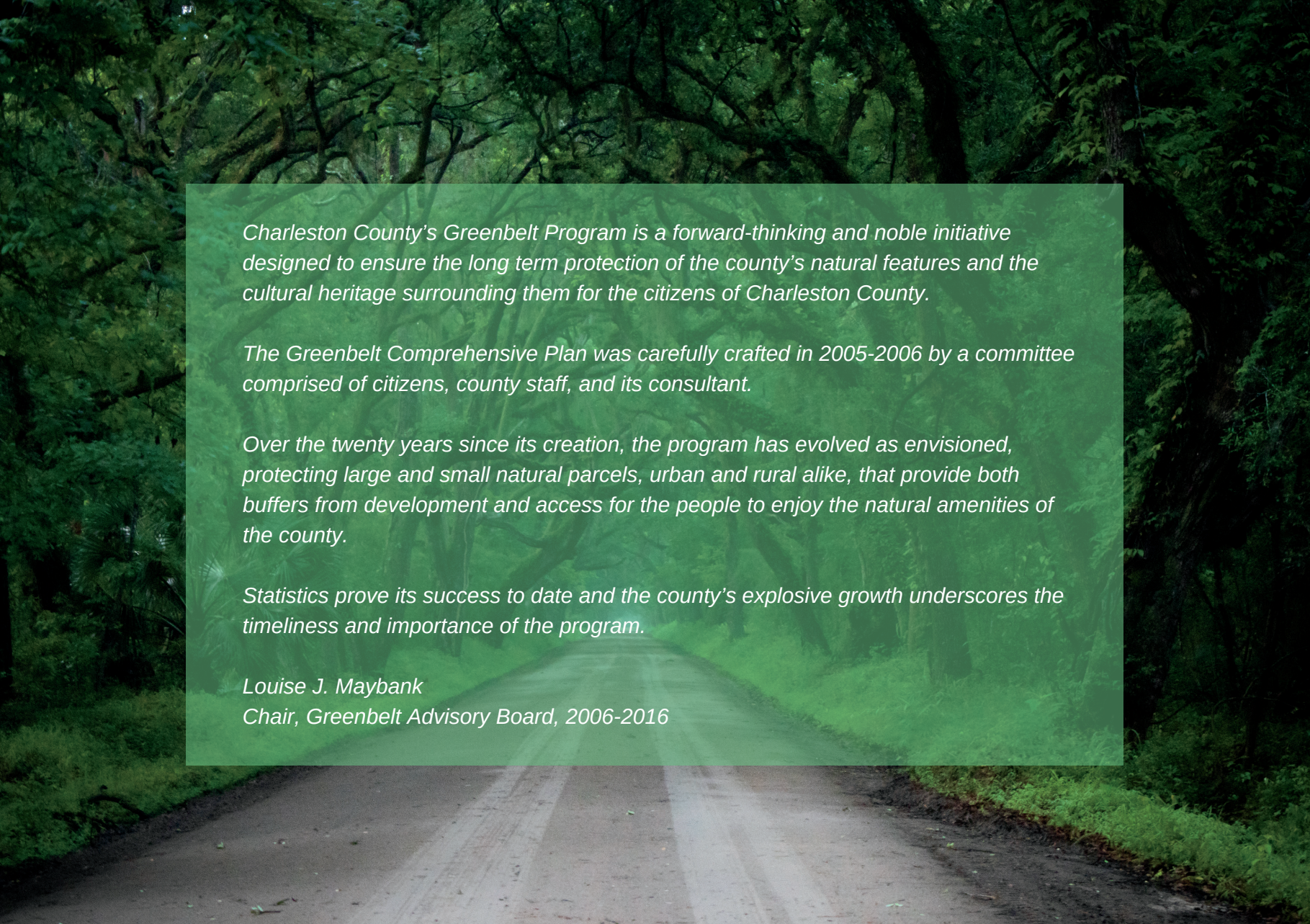
Existing 2006

160,000
acres



200,000
acres

Initial goal
achieved 2017



Charleston County's Greenbelt Program is a forward-thinking and noble initiative designed to ensure the long term protection of the county's natural features and the cultural heritage surrounding them for the citizens of Charleston County.

The Greenbelt Comprehensive Plan was carefully crafted in 2005-2006 by a committee comprised of citizens, county staff, and its consultant.

Over the twenty years since its creation, the program has evolved as envisioned, protecting large and small natural parcels, urban and rural alike, that provide both buffers from development and access for the people to enjoy the natural amenities of the county.

Statistics prove its success to date and the county's explosive growth underscores the timeliness and importance of the program.

*Louise J. Maybank
Chair, Greenbelt Advisory Board, 2006-2016*

PROGRAM STATISTICS

**249 TOTAL
PROJECTS**

**156
FEE
SIMPLE**

**72
CONSERVATION
EASEMENTS**

**11
CORRIDORS**

**10
MINOR IMPROVEMENT
ONLY**



**28,855
TOTAL
PROTECTED ACRES**

FEE SIMPLE ACRES

8,809 (30.5%)

CONSERVATION EASEMENT ACRES

19,856 (68.8%)

MINOR IMPROVEMENTS ACRES

190 (0.7%)

TOTAL FUNDS AWARDED

\$186,204,285

TOTAL MATCH FUNDS LEVERAGED

\$271,205,164

Environmental Impact

The Greenbelt Program has expanded protections for critical ecosystems such as marshes, swamps, forests, and floodplains. These natural resources play a vital role in maintaining healthy waterways, filtering stormwater, and buffering neighborhoods from flooding. By conserving land along rivers and coastlines, the program helps stabilize shorelines, protect wildlife corridors, and safeguard biodiversity within one of the most ecologically rich regions of the Southeast.



Angel Oak Park and Preserve - Johns Island, SC. Owned and managed by the Lowcountry Land Trust and the City of Charleston.



Dolphins strand feeding



Great Egret

Benefits of Protecting Greenspace

Protecting greenspace strengthens communities in ways that are both immediate and long-lasting. These natural areas clean our air and water, reduce flooding, and provide vital habitat for wildlife. They give people places to walk, explore, and connect with nature, improving health and well-being. Greenspaces also preserve the character of the Lowcountry, support outdoor recreation, and help ensure that future generations can enjoy the same beauty and natural resources we value today.



Roseate Spoonbill



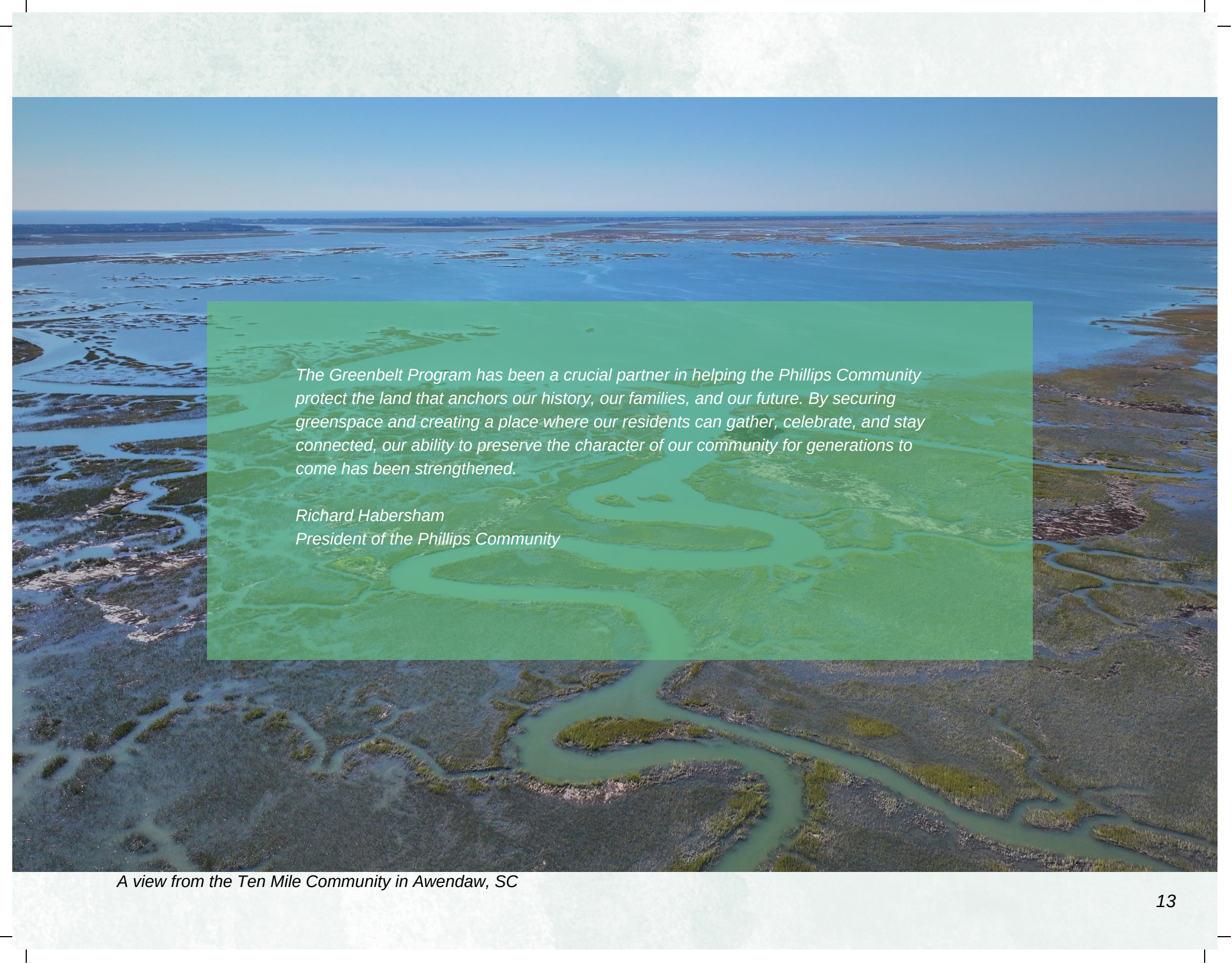
Dogs at Mixson Dog Park



Kayaker in an Edisto tidal creek



Waylyn Park in North Charleston

An aerial photograph of a coastal wetland area, likely a marsh or estuary. The landscape is characterized by a complex network of winding, light-colored waterways or channels that meander through darker, vegetated land. The water appears calm, reflecting the sky. The horizon is visible in the distance under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent green rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

The Greenbelt Program has been a crucial partner in helping the Phillips Community protect the land that anchors our history, our families, and our future. By securing greenspace and creating a place where our residents can gather, celebrate, and stay connected, our ability to preserve the character of our community for generations to come has been strengthened.

*Richard Habersham
President of the Phillips Community*

A view from the Ten Mile Community in Awendaw, SC

Two Decades of Impact

Every acre protected is a victory for our land, our water, and our way of life.



Charleston Area Therapeutic Riding (CATR) - Johns Island



Coakley Chapel - Mt. Pleasant



Station 24 Beach Access - Sullivan's Island



Magnolia Park and Community Garden - Charleston



Mill Point Park - James Island



Atlantic Creosote, Francis Marion National Forest - McClellanville



Boone Hall Plantation and Gardens - Mt. Pleasant



Botany Bay Expansion - Edisto Island



Awendaw Municipal Park - Awendaw



Roxbury Park - Meggett



Cummings Point - Charleston Harbor



Serenity Park - Hollywood



Ellis Park - North Charleston



Battery Island Landing at Sol Legare - James Island



Thornhill Farm - McClellanville



Fort Pemberton - James Island



Wadmalaw Island Community Center - Wadmalaw Island



Sweetgrass Park - Johns Island



Hutchinson House - Edisto Island



Roman Buck Park - James Island

Partnerships - The Key to Greenbelt Success

Working collaboratively with landowners, local governments, conservation nonprofits, government agencies, and land trusts, the Greenbelt Program has helped protect thousands of acres across Charleston County. These partnerships have safeguarded marshes, maritime forests, agricultural lands, historic landscapes, and properties that offer public access to nature. Many of these lands echo the philosophy shared by early conservationists like Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley, who believed that South Carolina's natural treasures were worth preserving not for short-term gain, but for generations yet to come.



Sea Island Small Farmers Co op ground breaking ceremony



Botany Bay Heritage Preserve Expansion dedication ceremony



Harrell Family Park grand opening



Pinckney Park ground greaking ceremony



The Mt. Pleasant Way Kenny Mile ground breaking ceremony



Gary Santos Park ground breaking ceremony

Thank you!

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude for celebrating 20 years with us.

The success of the Greenbelt Program would not be possible without the support of County Council, the public service from our current and former Board Members, and the partnerships with other governmental entities, land trusts, community organizations, landowners and Charleston County citizens.



Chris Dubuque, Shelby Marincasiu, Kylie Jeffords, Jennifer Matto, and Eric Davis

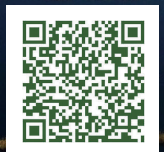
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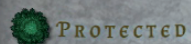


SCAN THE QR CODE
TO VISIT THE
GREENBELT WEBSITE



An aerial view of Tea Farm Creek behind CCPRC's Caw Caw Interpretive Center in Ravenel, SC

LEGEND



PROTECTED



CONSERVATION
EASEMENT



OPEN



Visit greenbelt.charlestoncounty.gov for more information